

THE GRAFTER—By Henry Kitchell Webster

The Family Cidaro Board a Small Coastwise Steamer and Captivate All Hands.
Some Inside Light on Central American Republics.

I SUPPOSE, since this tale is going to be literally and meticulously truthful, there must be a moral to it. Indeed, I can see that there is a moral, only I'm not quite clear in my mind what the moral is. We were coasting along from one hot, sandy little port to another, in a curiosity of maritime architecture whose proud boast was that she had once belonged to the Collins Line and had taken Gen. Grant or Martin Van Buren or somebody else from antique times on his first voyage to Europe. We were in no hurry; at least, if any of the passengers were, it was amply compensated for in the placid leisureliness of the ship. Under good weather conditions we used to log eight knots or thereabouts, but most of the voyage was occupied wallowing patiently at anchor in one roadstead after another, our cargo safely aboard, waiting for the command of the port to come out and sign our clearance papers. Generally speaking, the commandants had one of two kinds of fight, some of them or else he was just back from one and too drunk to intrust himself to the mercies of a longboat.

Once, indeed, when our captain had ventured to leave without this formality we were indignantly rebuffed back to our last port of call. That took three days, and it required another for the outraged official, now sufficiently sober to comprehend in a vague way what had happened, to fine and admonish us and vindicate his dignity and show his independence and eventually give us leave to go.

The captain's feelings and his language during those four days are no part of the story.

BUT you will understand that we had plenty of time, we passengers, to get acquainted. At the time of the inundation it was perhaps a fortnight since we had lain in day at Balboa, and it was in the mud at an angle of 20 degrees or so, waiting for the tide to give us a start on our voyage. We were just about the kind of ship's company that you'd expect to find down in that corner of the world.

There was a young French engineer named Atkinson, from somewhere the other side of the line, invalided home, he said, with neurasthenia, who, in order to be happy, had always to sit in a corner where no one could possibly come up behind him. He had a pretty wife, pale as a ghost, in spite of the scorch of the overhead sun, who played solitaire beside him while he watched and corrected and counted off the days as if the best of them were well lost.

There was a young French inventor, with a huge beard, dressed like a type from the Latin Quarter, who expounded the philosophy of anarchism and had gone a little mad over an electric device for cutting down hard wood timber. And there was an obese promoter who talked colloquially American with an indefinably foreign German accent, accompanied by a young lady utterly unaccounted for, except by her personal charms; an old doctor from down in Indiana, a couple of Nicaraguan political refugees who were trying to get up a revolution in Honduras, and a coffee planter with Spanish blood and a German accent and a high place, it was said, in the regard of the President of Guatemala.

There was a sprinkling of casuals, of course, including myself. I was there because I like the sea, as much as I dislike the modern seagoing hotel that spends a week crossing the North Atlantic in five days. Last of all (I have saved him till the last because he was the most important), there was the Englishman.

After one had looked at him and said to one's self, "Englishman," one didn't for awhile think very much more about him. He was a big man with a shy, retiring sort of manner. But the next time you saw him you wondered who he could be, and the time after that you were perfectly sure he must be somebody. And by the end of the day you weren't at all surprised to be told, in profane words perhaps, but in awed accents, by the purser, how great a man in this part of the world he really was. Among other things, it appeared that he owned—carried around in his vest pocket—one of these little Central American republics.

"Why," said the purser, lowering his voice and glancing around with a wary eye, "why, two or three months ago the president caught Johnny Moissant—caught him, and was going to shoot him, of course. And Mr. Brangwyn happened to hear about it and told the old man he'd have to let him go. And he did. What do you know about that?"

We agreed with the purser that that had been the manifestation of "some power."

BECAUSE, you see, this was all many years ago, before Johnny Moissant had flown across the English Channel with his cat and so burst upon the astonished eyes of Europe and the rest of the civilized world. He had been bursting upon the astonished eyes of various little Central American potentates at unexpected and disastrous intervals for a good while before that, and he whispered his name all along the coast with awe. Indeed, when our ship had lain all one day in the harbor of Los Arenas, our propeller fouled upon a stern line which the Nicaraguan republic hadn't lifted over the smuggling port quickly enough, we had under our eyes the spectacle of a little white American man-of-war loafing around, ostensibly with its hands in its pockets, but keeping a wary eye on the Nicaraguan navy. The Nicaraguan navy consisted of an old-fashioned steam launch with a bow and it was suspected that Johnny Moissant was planning to slip away in it with a gallant army of five or six and inflict irreparable damage upon the republic of Honduras. The man who had the power to turn Johnny Moissant loose after the president of any of those republics had actually caught him might safely be said to carry that republic around in his vest pocket.

It wasn't Mr. Brangwyn's fault that

he made us all a little uncomfortable. There is something about the climate of that part of the world that has a queer effect upon morals. Even a perfectly innocent, respectable, uneventful person like myself wakes up in the morning with an uneasy conviction that he, like the rest, must have a lurid past and that if any one should come up to him furtively and whisper, "They're on old man; you'd better beat it," he would have to disappear, change his name and turn up in some remote and unknown spot.

Perhaps those of our passengers to whom this sensation was chronic, those of us who had come by it, I may say, more dishonestly, may not have been so acutely conscious of the source of Mr. Brangwyn's seeming aloofness. And perhaps in their case his aloofness wasn't quite so seeming. Anyway, he made no parade of righteousness; gave himself no deliberate air of being a horse of another color altogether from the ramshackle, loose-and-easy, whitey town parcel of humanity that gave tone and color to our passenger list.

When he walked by on deck without noticing the promoter, the effect he produced was so simply of having failed to see him that the promoter immediately confessed to me that he knew Brangwyn well; had known him for years.

Well, that's the way we went along comfortably for a fortnight. Somewhere line rising and falling as we swung at anchor watching the unswerving labors of gangs of natives who had come out to our side in lighters, loaded with coffee or bananas, or mahogany logs, as the case might be, listening lazily to the detonations of the first officer and the whistle of the Portuguese boatswain—a whistle that was a good enough language for anybody and, apparently, the only one he had.

We gossiped and repeated stories about each other, getting along, on the whole, famously. The old doctor from Indiana struck up a thoroughly friendly acquaintance with the young lady who was traveling with the promoter; expounded his ethical views to her—and they were mighty good views, although in the present instance a little out of focus—told her long stories about his neighbors and asked her innumerable questions about life on the west coast.

THE political refugees conspired darkly about one of the lifeboats, the promoter and the coffee planter swapped rascalties, invariably successful in the evening, of admiring casuals; the Atkinsons played solitaire a deck in their corner, and Mr. Brangwyn sat in the lee of the wheelhouse, smoked cigars and read novels. The French engineer had taken an unhappy fancy to me, I think, on the hope that I should some day make him understand why he had to pay more for the privilege of leaving a ship at an intermediate point than it would have cost him to complete the voyage to San Francisco. That's about how things were before the inundation.

The inundation was the family of Senor Cidaro. They came aboard one day in box loads, the box being a sort of improvised elevator swung over the side by means of a boom and tackle and raised and lowered more or less in accordance with the enormous rise and fall of the ground swell. It took several loads to get them all on board, but when it was decided, by themselves, that they were all there we other passengers took a sort of rough census of them.

There was Senor Cidaro himself. You really have to count him, I suppose. And then there was Mme. Cidaro, who ought to count for half a dozen, at least. And then the children. Unfortunately, we weren't quick enough to count them while they were all collected in a body. They flowed apart and spread about the deck like so many drops of quicksilver. After that, counting the children became one of our regular

amusements and the results would come out anywhere from eight to fourteen, depending, apparently, on how many times we counted the twins.

One queer thing about them was that while Senor Cidaro was Spanish and Madame French, the children were, to all appearances, English. Their names were English, at least, and English was the language they romped and scolded in. Senor could speak a little very poor French, besides his own tongue, and Madame had a little rudimentary English. So the children talked Spanish to their papa and French to their mother.

Now here is where you will perceive that this tale isn't a work of fiction, but, as I said at the beginning, an accurate account of the facts. For, in any fictional narrative, the presence of eight children—that has always been my theory of the number—all under fourteen years old, on any sort of ship, let alone a cramped-up little thousand-ton cargo boat, would be a nuisance that would make life hardly endurable to the rest of the passengers.

As a matter of fact, those children charmed us out of our wits. For myself, I know that the moment Helen bumped her heavy tin suit case into my legs and looked up with a startled, apologetic little smile and begged my pardon, I felt absurdly pleased over the incident, took the ridiculous thing from her and asked her where she wanted it put. And when she smiled again and confessed that she didn't know, I felt that she and I were old friends. The same thing was evidently true of the other passengers. Even the Atkinsons came out of their corner and lent a hand at the business of making the new arrivals feel comfortable and at home.

It wasn't a matter of novelty either. No matter how many times you forgot Henry's swing, which the boatswain rigged for them from a boom between two of the deck houses and collared with him, in the course of an attempt to promenade up and down the narrow deck, you always regretted spoiling his sport and stopped long enough to help him work up again. And if you happened to stumble over Albert at the head of the dark companionway just as the ship was taking in a squall, it never occurred to you that that was no place for a child to be playing with the ship's quilts.

MIND you, there was nothing angelic about them. The boys were crop-headed, square-toed little brats and the girls wouldn't have been called pretty by an impartial observer, if you could have found one. They were all miserably clad in threadbare mourning for somebody, apparently long since deceased. I suppose the family finances had never been equal to a new wardrobe. They were simply the best bred, pleasantest, most wholly natural children you ever saw.

It wasn't until we had been wondering about them for a day or two and had got to taking them more or less for granted, that we began to become aware of Madame. Then we perceived that she was quite as wonderful as they were. You might take her age at anywhere from twenty-six to forty, depending on what age you thought the more attractive. She told me one evening that she was thirty-three. But that was just after she had made a bet with me that she was older than I was.

She wasn't pretty, any more than her daughters were. But she could sit down with a novel, all by herself in some temporarily deserted part of the deck, and in half an hour we'd all be there, talking volubly, if ungrammatically, in three languages, interpreting for one another, gossiping about Central American politics or deriding the wild abstractions of the French engineer. Madame would sit there, lazily at ease, keeping her place in her novel with her finger and occasionally opening it and reading a paragraph to herself, as if perfectly unconscious that she was the center of it all.

One of the casuals had a wonderful contrivance that he used as a deck chair, having bought it, he said, in the bazaar at Panama. It was a be-

wicering congeries of sticks and odd-shaped bits of cast iron with sail cloth, but it was wonderfully comfortable to sit in. You could sit up straight to read, or lie out flat to sleep, or swing, half-reclining with the roll of the ship, just by wishing to do so. You thought of the position you wanted and the chair, if it was a chair, took it. And no one, not even the French engineer, could explain why.

After the inundation, the unlucky casual who bought it spent most of the voyage on his feet, because some member of the family was always trying it out and exclaiming over its wonders. They always popped out of it the moment the casual hove in sight. But, as they had, of course, no deck chairs of their own, and as he was as badly infatuated as any of the rest of us, these relinquishments availed him nothing. It finally came to be regarded as Madame's chair, and after she had confessed that she generally came out late, when the deck was deserted, and spent the night in it, he gave up even a nominal proprietorship.

BUT, if I have implied that all of us, the whole passenger list, together with the officers and the crew, became satellites revolving in some irregular orbit around the family of Senor Cidaro, I have been guilty of inaccuracy. We did, with the sole exception of the Englishman, Mr. Brangwyn never made one of the group that loitered the hours away within hailing distance of Madame's chair. He never impersonated wild animals for Henry and Albert or took Helen on his lap and told her a story. Three times a day, when Madame came down into the dining saloon, he bowed to her gravely across the captain's table. And that was all. As this went on from day to day, our vague discomfort at his remotely isolated superiority gave place to indignation. But he seemed as unconscious of that as he was of everything else.

I don't know how it came about, for Senor Cidaro never talked at all, and so far as I know, Madame never talked about him, but it wasn't long before we found that we were fully acquainted with their history—if you can call a perfectly passive acceptance of events by that name.

The senior belonged, it appeared, to a Central American family that had once been rich and powerful. Or, to put the thing in a more accurate and orderly way, to a position of political advantage and had made it pay. The senior himself had been sent to Paris in his youth to acquire an education and study law. Instead of doing either of these things, however, he had immediately fallen in love with Madame and married her. It being apparent to his family that no further studies were to be expected of him, they got him a job—pardon me, a post; namely, the consulate at Liverpool, and saw to it that his post was made appropriately remunerative. The senior went to Liverpool and lived there for years, devoting his pay and his perquisites to feeding and clothing and, generally speaking, allowing to grow up his steadily enlarging family. Then his people at home lost their influence and the government promptly abolished his job, or, at any rate, abolished his pay, which came to the same thing. So now they were coming home to a country his wife and children had never seen.

It was hard for any of us to think of anything else they could have done. The senior was evidently perfectly helpless; incapable of any real work that would earn a living for himself alone, to say nothing of the hostages he had given to fortune. And yet what could he hope to gain by coming back was equally hard to figure out. One could imagine the sort of welcome they would get both from the government and from his discredited and powerless relatives. The moral we thought about the situation the more acutely unhappy we became. Indeed, it got to the point where we couldn't think or talk of anything else. What the deuce was to become of the family of Senor Cidaro? We asked the question in one form or another a dozen times a day.

I wheeled around and went all the way aft to the smokeroom. No one used the smokeroom very much. It was upholstered in damp leather, and it was about the size of a continental railway carriage. But tonight I found Mr. Brangwyn there, and I was rather glad of it. He was an oasis in the encircling gloom. He encouraged me to have a drink and offered me a cigar.

"I've got to turn out early tomorrow morning and go ashore," he said. He seemed a little bored by the prospect, but half amused, too. "His excellency wants me to come up to luncheon tomorrow." "The President?" I exclaimed. "Has he come down from the capital?" "No," said Mr. Brangwyn. "I've got to go up. He says he's sending a special train that'll leave about 7 o'clock, and send me back in another in time for dinner on board."

"Rather a Tartar, isn't he?" I ventured. "From the stories they tell, a sort of combination French apache and American confidence man. I don't know whether I'd care to luncheon with him or not—if I happened to possess anything I thought he might happen to want."

"At least half the stories are probably more than half true," Mr. Brangwyn paused a moment before he passed on. "When I was in the city he was generally on a large scale, and when he murders there are generally mitigating circumstances—political necessity, and so on. He's so much better than any of his neighbors that I'm inclined to consider him honest. Really, you know, I like him. And I think he likes me. I've never asked him for anything, and he knows it's no use trying to hold me up, as you Americans say, so we get on famously. I never broke my rule for anybody in all this devilish hole of a country, I'd break it for him and invite him to my house."

HE saw I was looking rather surprised at that. "Of course, I have to entertain a great deal," he explained. "But I have a separate house for that. A sort of private club—where all these thieves and rascals can come. I go down there and dine with 'em, and so on. Make themselves at home—lunching always out, and all that. But where I live I keep for decent people, and I've never found any one yet that I'd invite there. To be sure, I've lived here only twenty years."



MADAME COULD SIT DOWN WITH A NOVEL, ALL BY HERSELF, AND IN HALF AN HOUR WE'D ALL BE THERE.

The senior lounged all day in the captain's chair, asleep or awake, we couldn't tell which, and I doubt if he could. Madame read bits of her novel, conversed with us en bloc, or flirted with us—oh, in a perfectly nice way—seriatim. She took to singing to us, too; little French songs in the saloon after dinner. (Oh, she sang them very badly, I admit. There was no chance of a living for them that way. But we liked it.) And the children larked about all over the ship, generously included us in their games, and made us forget, from time to time, our troubles. Which were, he observed, the barren prospects of the family of the Senor Cidaro.

We got lower and lower in our minds as the time drew on for them to leave us. Already the coast line we were following belonged to that cruel state that had abolished senior's job; that had turned drift the faithful. No, he probably hadn't been faithful. And it was inconceivable that he'd ever been any good. Well, anyhow, another day or two would see them going ashore to find their fortune. And yet if they were to be so successful, they would be leaving us on deck with sighs and shakes of the head, and everybody would be every-where else was thinking about. Excepting always, Mr. Brangwyn.

THE last evening of all—it was a dreadfully stormy one. We avoided one another as much as we could and, more or less, the family. We ought, of course, to have pitched in and been jolly, but this was fairly beyond our powers. We were already at anchor off the little port where they were to disembark, and the excitement of the next day was upon us. As we strolled forward where there weren't many lights and one could see the sky better I saw Madame and one of the casuals leaning against the rail. I'd better join them, I thought. I'd hardly spoken to her since dinner. I'd hardly spoken to her since dinner. I'd hardly spoken to her since dinner. I'd hardly spoken to her since dinner.

"Et adieu!" She flung in a rather long pause with a sigh and I stopped where I was. "Demain!" The casual made a gesture toward the heavens. "Il sera, toujours, lune," he said, in that perfectly correct French he was so proud of. "Il sera."

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He paused there for a good, long drink. "Pleasant people, I'll admit. Some really charming people. But a really calm, honest man, who could be trusted, say, to administer an estate—not one in the whole of Central America."

"And yet you've lived here twenty years?" "Habit, I suppose. I've really got to like it. I've my own place, and I mind my own business. My mines and settlements I run as I see fit. I even have my own mint, so that if I ever have to coin my own money to pay off my labor, I can. Because there isn't a really solvent bank in the country. But I let the people alone and I let politics alone. And the president lets me alone except that he's going to make me spend nine hours tomorrow riding on his horrible railroad just to take lunch with him."

We heard Helen's voice outside just then. She was calling, "Maman! Just very loud. The next minute she stepped in the doorway. "Have you seen my mother anywhere?" she asked. Her smile had just that same look of wistful deprecation that I had seen in it when she bumped her tin suit case into my legs. "Antoinette is all broken out with something, and I want mother to see before I put her to bed."

"I'll try to help you find her," said I.

"The deuce!" said Mr. Brangwyn softly into his glass. It was rather a relief to all of us. I think that he was gone in his special train before any of the rest of us had an appearance. His absence removed the one unsympathetic note in our party from the family of Senor Cidaro. Even supposing he was right in the low opinion he held of all Central Americans, couldn't there be an exception? And yet if his voice of reason did whisper that if there were an exception, Senor Cidaro was not likely to be it. Why couldn't one of the others of us, the coffee planter or the promoter, have been the one to receive that invitation to spend the night with his excellency at the capital? There must be ways of managing such things—of bribing somebody or putting something over so that Madame would be able to live comfortably in the capital and the children could play their care-free games—and Senor Cidaro wouldn't have to work.

Well, it was a painful morning. The health officers came aboard with the evident intention of examining that unlucky family for every known disease and putting them in quarantine, if possible, or forbidding them to land at all.

When they were balked in this intention by the invincible healthiness of the family, the rash had fortunately disappeared the customs officers took a hand in the game. The pathetically meager little mound of baggage was pawed over and flung about as if the treasure of Golconda might have been hidden away inside. We were powerless, of course. Madame herself made a spirited protest when she found a drunken little doctor on the point of vaccinating one of the children twice, but the senior himself stood helplessly by, not seeming to think that anything mattered or that anything could be done. He'd had too much to drink, I believe.

They'd begun throwing the children overboard. Very likely the president would have ordered that done if he'd thought of it.

The miserable scene came to an end at last. The boom and tackle was swung overboard, the box was prepared, and the family, in tearful installments, went over the side and were bumped down into a lighter that waited there, and finally, four greasy pirates in charge of it, with great deliberation started rowing toward shore. With heavy hearts we manned the rail and waved a last adieu to the family of Senor Cidaro.

LATE that night I found Mr. Brangwyn in the smoke room once more, drinking a whiskey soda (he carried his own whiskey with him) and smoking one of his excellent cigars. And once more he encouraged me to join him in one of each. There was something about his large placid repose that made him a good companion when you were feeling low in your mind.

"Well," I observed, "you got back safe. His excellency didn't poison you nor fill you up with alcohol and red pepper, nor any of his other little parlor tricks." He smiled comfortably. "I suppose," I concluded, "he's sending me up for those unlucky Cidaros."

"Don't worry about them," he said, rather crossly. "Let's forget 'em."

"I suppose I shall get them out of my head in a day or two," I conceded.

"But we've all been pretty unhappy about them." "Confound a man like that!" Mr. Brangwyn's big hand made the glass jump. "He reaches a new level of uselessness even in Central America. I never saw such a man. His night's rest seems to leave him completely exhausted for the whole of the next day. Him and his family! What right has he got to have a family like that? How many children were there?"

"I still say eight," I told him. "Do you know what would happen to them? He's got some relatives, of sorts—cousins and so on. Oh, I know all about them. Well, they'd let him live around and they'd divide his family up among them. Those little girls—the two oldest—they'd really be in service, though no one would exactly call it that. But, do you know what would happen to those two little girls—within a year—just as sure as sunrise?"

I could have guessed. Indeed, his tone and his manner put it beyond guessing. But I wasn't thinking about that. My mind was focused on the tense of his verb. "You aren't saying it will happen, though?" I exclaimed. "You said it would have!"

"Oh, yes, I took a hand," he confessed, in a tone of the greatest diffidence. "I told his excellency I wanted a job. He jumped right out of his chair. Pleased, of course, that I should have come down on him at last. Told me his whole civil list was entirely at my disposal. 'Well,' I said, 'I'll take it.'"

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French Legislators And Their Interests

PARIS, June 25. The French Parliament recently renewed by general elections its lower house—the Chamber of Deputies. Its political color, has changed—

And like a lobster boiled, the moral From black to red begins to turn.

If socialism is red this sums up the turn which the Parliament of Great Britain, has taken. But what about the members of Parliament? Who were they and what were they doing in the world before they came into politics?

The kinds of citizens who have succeeded in getting elected do not change much from one Parliament to another. It is about the same in England and in the American Congress. It is only the political color that has changed.

About one-fourth of the new 400 deputies are lawyers, by profession, but it would be hard to say how many of these have ever practiced with any success. Some of them, like President Millerand and former Prime Minister Poincaré, had very great success at the bar and they have retained an interest in the law offices which make a better living for them than politics ever can. Such deputies, when they lose their election, go back to their law practice. Others, like former Prime Minister Briand, who was caught early by journalism, stick it out in politics and get re-elected. Poincaré is still senator, which is compatible with that of prime minister, but Millerand, when he ceases to be president, will become a private citizen.

After the lawyers, doctors have always been an important influence in the French Parliament, and some of them have been genuine practitioners. Then there have been engineers, like Clemenceau, practiced medicine fourteen years in a modest quarter of Paris, sometimes while he was actually a member of Parliament or between the elections which he lost and those he won.

Socialists nowadays do not like Clemenceau, but it was he who invented the radical Socialist grouping in politics on which they have sailed into power. In general, doctors in Parliament, at least in France, are predisposed to see red.

Teachers of all kinds, from university professors to primary schoolmasters, have always had particular aptitude for politics, electioneering and parliamentary debate. Jaures, who made the Socialist party what it is, was a professor of philosophy. Painlevé, who was prime minister in the war and has been several other sorts of minister, and is to have a prominent place in the new government, is a professor of the very highest kind of mathematics. Bracké, who was a Socialist, jumping off into communism, was a university professor of Greek. Harriot himself,

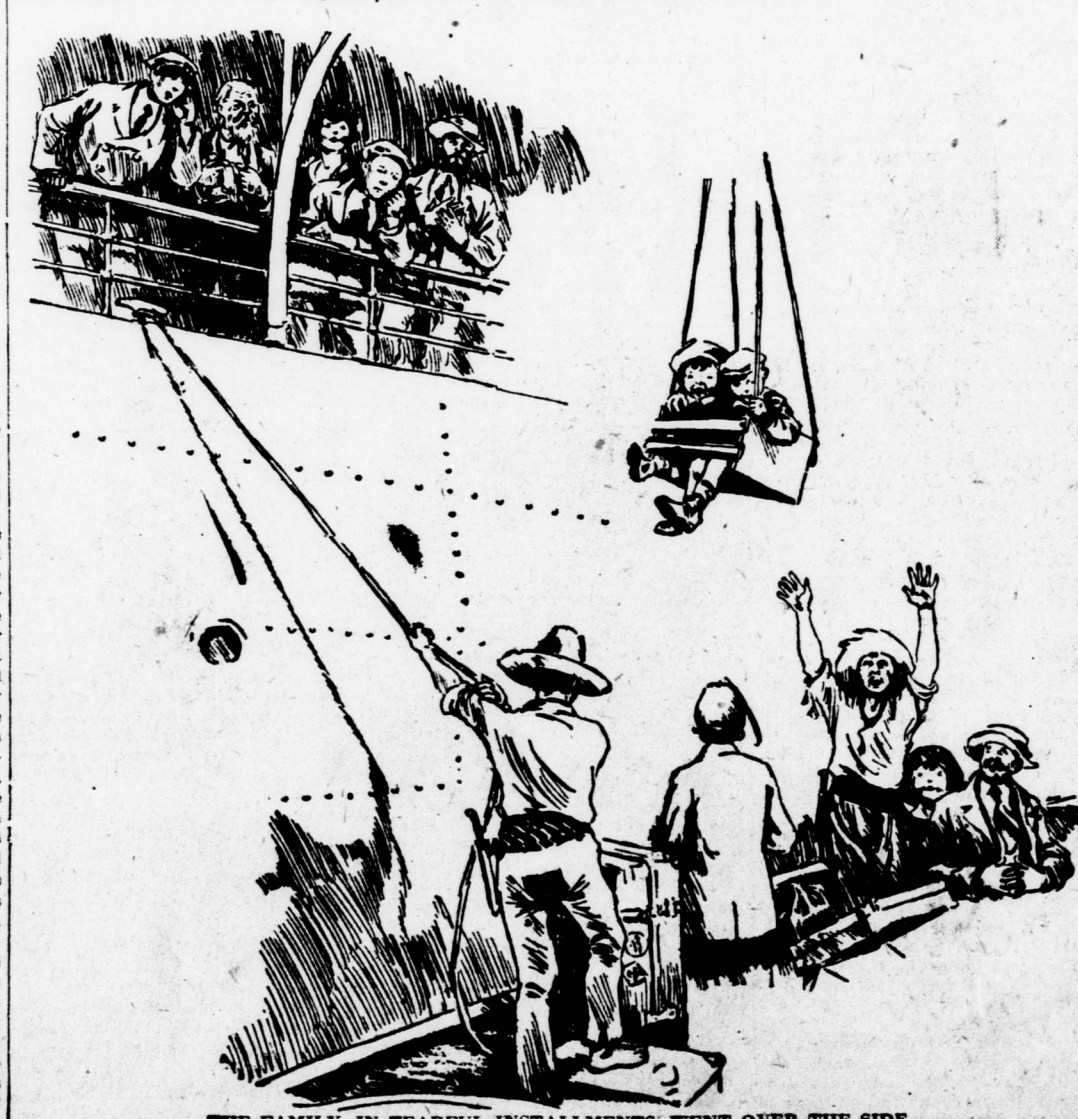
said, I mean business. I want a secretarial job, with no duties, that will pay a salary of three hundred pounds a year. And I'd like the commission made out now. He had rung for his secretary before I was done speaking. His eyebrows went up when I told him who it was for, though. He took it well enough when he'd got his breath. Said he was delighted to learn that the senior was a friend of mine and that he'd make a point of furthering his interest in every possible way. Then he said he'd heard that Madame was a very charming woman, and for sixpence I'd have taken a punch at him. But I took the commission instead. And my special on the way down met the local, with them on it, on the way up. So I sent it in to him then and there."

I sat speechless while he puffed his cigar almost to the point of inflammation. "I wouldn't have done it for any man," he said. "Nor for any woman. But I couldn't stand those moments when he explained the common grafter like the rest."

He took up his glass and I took mine, and we drained them silently, though I doubt if we drank to the same toast.

"The deuce!" said Mr. Brangwyn softly into his glass. As I said at the beginning, I am sure there must be a moral to this strictly truthful tale. I can see that there is a moral. Only I am not entirely clear in my mind what the moral is.

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THE FAMILY, IN TEARFUL INSTALLMENTS, WENT OVER THE SIDE.

STERLING, HEILIG.

Rainbow Upside Down.

EASTPORT, Me., folk have seen a good many amazing things, but nothing that quite compares with what they glimpsed in the sky the other day—an inverted rainbow. One man said that the fellow that wanted to look for the traditional pot of gold would have to have a long ladder to find it. Nobody recalls having seen anything of the sort before.